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## DOCUMENTS.

### LETTERS OF GOVERNOR EDWARD COLES BEARING ON THE STRUGGLE OF FREEDOM AND SLAVERY IN ILLINOIS<sup>1</sup>

Edward Coles was born of distinguished parentage in Albemarle County, Virginia, December 15, 1786. He was educated at Hampden-Sidney and William and Mary College, having as classmates Lieutenant-General Scott, President John Tyler, Senator William S. Archer and Mr. Justice Baldwin, of the Supreme Court of the United States. At the age of twenty-three his father had bequeathed him a large plantation with a number of slaves. "Of a polished education, fine personal appearance, good manners and irreproachable character,"<sup>2</sup> he so impressed President Madison that he made him his private secretary in 1809. In this position he became well informed in public affairs and useful to the President.

Early in Coles' college days he discussed with himself the question as to whether the declaration that "all men are born free and equal" could be harmonized with slavery. He reached the conclusion that the institution should not exist in a country claiming to be a democracy. He, therefore, resolved that he would not hold slaves and would not live in a slave-holding State.

Enjoying the confidence of Jefferson, Coles took up with him the important question of emancipating his slaves in the year 1814. The letter follows:

EDWARD COLES TO THOMAS JEFFERSON

WASHINGTON, July 31, 1814.

*Dear Sir:*—I never took up my pen with more hesitation, or felt more embarrassment than I now do in addressing you on the

<sup>1</sup> These letters are taken from E. B. Washburne's *Sketch of Edward Coles, Second Governor of Illinois, and of the Slavery Struggle of 1823-1824*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

subject of this letter. The fear of appearing presumptuous distresses me, and would deter me from venturing thus to call your attention to a subject of such magnitude, and so beset with difficulties as that of a general emancipation of the slaves of Virginia, had I not the highest opinion of your goodness and liberality, in not only excusing me for the liberty I take, but in justly appreciating my motives in doing so.

I will not enter on the *right* which man has to enslave his brother man, nor upon the moral and political effects of slavery on individuals or on society; because these things are better understood by you than by me. My object is to entreat and beseech you to exert your knowledge and influence in devising and getting into operation some plan for the gradual emancipation of slavery. This difficult task could be less exceptionally and more successfully performed by the revered fathers of all our political and social blessings than by any succeeding statesmen; and would seem to come with peculiar propriety and force from those whose valor, wisdom and virtue have done so much in ameliorating the condition of mankind. And it is a duty, as I conceive, that devolves particularly on you, from your known philosophical and enlarged view of subjects, and from the principles you have professed and practiced through a long and useful life, pre-eminently distinguished as well by being foremost in establishing on the broadest basis the rights of man, and the liberty and independence of your country, as in being throughout honored with the most important trusts of your fellow citizens, whose confidence and love you have carried with you into the shades of old age and retirement. In the calm of this retirement you might, most beneficially to society, and with much addition to your own fame, avail yourself of that love and confidence to put into complete practice those hallowed principles contained in that renowned Declaration, of which you were the immortal author, and on which we founded our right to resist oppression and establish our freedom and independence.

I hope the fear of failing, at this time, will have no influence in preventing you from employing your pen to eradicate this most degrading feature of British Colonial policy, which is still permitted to exist, notwithstanding its repugnance as well to the principles of our revolution as to our free institutions. For however prized and influential your opinions may now be, they will still be much more so when you shall have been taken from us by the course of nature. If, therefore, your attempt should now fail to

rectify this unfortunate evil—an evil most injurious both to the oppressed and to the oppressor—at some future day when your memory will be consecrated by a grateful posterity, what influence, irresistible influence will the opinions and writings of Thomas Jefferson have in all questions connected with the rights of man, and of that policy which will be the creed of your disciples. Permit men then, my dear Sir, again to entreat your great powers of mind and influence, and to employ some of your present leisure, in devising a mode to liberate one-half of our fellow beings from an ignominious bondage to the other, either by making an immediate attempt to put in train a plan to commence this goodly work, or to leave human nature the invaluable Testament—which you are so capable of doing—how best to establish its rights; so that the weight of your opinion may be on the side of emancipation when that question shall be agitated, and that it will be sooner or later is most certain. That it may be soon is my most ardent prayer—that it will be, rests with you.

I will only add as an excuse for the liberty I take in addressing you on this subject which is so particularly interesting to me, that from the time I was capable of reflecting on the nature of political society, and of the rights appertaining to man, I have not only been principled against slavery, but have had feelings so repugnant to it as to decide me not to hold them; which decision has forced me to leave my native State, and with it all my relations and friends. This, I hope, will be deemed by you some excuse for the liberty of this intrusion, of which I gladly avail myself to assure you of the very great respect and esteem with which I am, my dear Sir, your very sincere and devoted friend,<sup>3</sup>

EDWARD COLES.

He wrote Jefferson the following concerning the same question about two months later:

WASHINGTON, Sep. 26th, '14.

I must be permitted again to trouble you, my dear Sir, to return my grateful thanks for the respectful and friendly attention shown to my letter in your answer of the 25th ult. Your favorable reception of sentiments not generally avowed, if felt, by our countrymen, but which have ever been so inseparably interwoven with

<sup>3</sup> Jefferson's reply was published in *THE JOURNAL OF NEGRO HISTORY*, Vol. III, p. 83.

my opinions and feelings as to become, as it were, the rudder that shapes my course, even against a strong tide of interest and of local partialities, could not but be in the highest degree gratifying to me. And your interesting and highly prized letter conveying them to me in such flattering terms, would have called forth my acknowledgments before this but for its having been forwarded to me to the Springs, and from thence it was again returned here before I received it, which was only a few days since.

Your indulgent treatment encourages me to add that I feel very sensibly the force of your remarks on the impropriety of yielding to my repugnancies in abandoning my property in slaves and my native State. I certainly should never have been inclined to yield to them if I had supposed myself capable of being instrumental in bringing about a liberation, or that I could by my example ameliorate the condition of these oppressed people. If I could be convinced of being in the slightest degree useful in doing either, it would afford me very great happiness, and the more so as it would enable me to gratify many partialities by remaining in Virginia. But never having flattered myself with the hope of being able to contribute to either, I have long since determined, and should but for my bad health ere this, have removed, carrying along with me those who had been my slaves, to the country north-west of the river Ohio.

Your prayers I trust will not only be heard with indulgence in Heaven, but with influence on Earth. But I cannot agree with you that they are the only weapons of one at your age; nor that the difficult work of cleansing the escutcheon of Virginia of the foul stain of slavery can best be done by the young. To expect so great and difficult an object, great and extensive powers, both of mind and influence, are required, which can never be possessed in so great a degree by the young as by the old. And among the few of the former who might unite the disposition with the requisite capacity, they are too often led by ambitious views to go with the current of popular feeling rather than to mark out a course for themselves, where they might be buffeted by the waves of opposition; and indeed it is feared that these waves would in this case be too strong to be effectually resisted by any but those who had gained by a previous course of useful employment the firmest footing in the confidence and attachment of their country. It is with them, therefore, I am persuaded, that the subject of emancipation must originate; for they are the only persons who have it in their

power effectually to arouse and enlighten the public sentiment, which in matters of this kind ought not to be expected to lead, but to be led; nor ought it to be wondered at that there should prevail a degree of apathy with the general mass of mankind, where a mere passive principle of right has to contend against the weighty influence of habit and interest. On such a question there will always exist in society a kind of *vis inertia*, to arouse and overcome, which requires a strong impulse, which can only be given by those who have acquired a great weight of character, and on whom there devolves in this case a most solemn obligation. It was under these impressions that I looked to you, my dear Sir, as the first of our aged worthies to awaken our fellow-citizens from their infatuation to a proper sense of justice, and to the true interest of their country; and by proposing a system for the gradual emancipation of our slaves, at once to form a rallying point for its friends, who, enlightened by your wisdom and experience, and supported and encouraged by your sanction and patronage, might look forward to a propitious and happy result. Your time of life I had not considered as an obstacle to the undertaking. Doctor Franklin, to whom, by the way, Pennsylvania owes her early ridance of the evils of slavery, was as actively and as usefully employed on as arduous duties after he had past your age as he had ever been at any period of his life.

With apologizing for having given you so much trouble on this subject, and again repeating my thanks for the respectful and flattering attention you have been pleased to pay to it, I renew the assurances of the great respect and regard which makes me most sincerely yours

EDWARD COLES.

Coles went west to find a suitable location for settlement but was delayed in carrying out the enterprise by serving on a special mission to Russia in 1816. He then moved in 1819 to Edwardsville, Illinois, where he emancipated his slaves. Arriving in that State just at the time its citizens were trying to decide whether or not that commonwealth should be a slave or free State, this anti-slavery man turned the tide in favor of freedom. He had been in the State only three years when he was nominated by the anti-slavery party for governor. He received a minority of the

votes cast at the election in 1822; but owing to a split in the pro-slavery party which divided its votes between two candidates, Coles was elected, although the friends of slavery elected their candidate for lieutenant-governor and a majority of the members of both branches of the legislature. There ensued then a struggle to have a convention called so to change the constitution as to make Illinois a slave State.

Judge Gillespie, a contemporary, described the situation as follows:

It was conceded in those days that a State formed out of the "North West Territory" could not be *admitted* into the Union contrary to the provisions of the ordinance of 1787, which prohibited slavery, but the slavery propagandists contended that you could, the next day after being admitted under an *anti-slavery* constitution, change the constitution so as to admit slavery, and in that way, "whip the devil around the stump." It was likewise contended that slavery existed in Illinois beyond Congressional interference, by virtue of the treaty (of 1763) between France and England, and that between England and the United States at the close of the Revolutionary War, in both of which the rights of the French inhabitants were guaranteed. One of these rights was that of holding slaves, which, it was contended, was protected by treaty stipulation, and was equal in binding effect, to the Constitution (of the United States) itself. Besides, it was maintained, that by the conquest of George Rogers Clark, this country became a part of Virginia, and that Congress had no more power to abolish slavery in Illinois, than it had in Virginia. The logic of the times was that the French inhabitants had the right to hold slaves, and that the other inhabitants had equal rights with the French—ergo: they all had the right to hold slaves. This was the argument of the celebrated constitutional expounder—John Grammar, of Union county—in the Legislature in reply to an intimation questioning the validity of the title of slaves in Illinois. The old gentleman instantly arose and remarked "that fittener men" than he was "mout hev been found to defend the masters agin the sneakin' ways of the infernal abolitioners; but havin' rights on my side, I don't fear, Sir. I will show that are proposition is unconstitutional, illegal, and fornenst the compact. Don't every one know, or leastwise had ought to know, that the Congress that sot at *Post Vinsan*, garnisheed to the old French inhabitants the right

to their niggers, and haint I got as much rights as any Frenchman in this State? Answer me that, Sir." Notwithstanding this seeming confidence, these men were exceedingly desirous of reinforcing their rights. They resorted to the indenturing method, by which they got their servant to go before some officer and bind himself to serve the master, generally for ninety-nine years, for which he was to receive a slight equivalent at the end of each year.

As the "Yankees" increased in numbers, confidence (on the part of the pro-slavery men) in the titles to their negroes, diminished, and they finally concluded that there was no assurance for them, except in changing the constitution so as to sanction slaveholding and thus the contest commenced, which for fierceness and rancor excelled anything ever before witnessed. The people were at the point of going to war with each other. The pro-slavery men were, as they have always been ready to resort to violence whenever they dared, unwilling to listen to, or incapable of comprehending arguments. Their method of overcoming opposition was by "bulldozing"; but on this occasion they had to encounter men of invincible courage, who were eager and willing to 'beard the lion in his den,' and defend their rights at all hazards. Many of these men had removed to Illinois to get rid of the curse of slavery.

This scheme, however, was with much difficulty defeated and the State was saved for freedom. The intensity of this struggle has been well described by Governor Reynolds in his *My Own Times*. He says:

The convention question gave rise to two years of the most furious and boisterous excitement and contest that ever was visited on Illinois. Men, women and children entered the arena of party warfare and strife, and the families and neighborhoods were so divided and furious and bitter against one another, that it seemed a regular civil war might be the result. Many personal combats were indulged in on the question, and the whole country seemed, at times, to be ready and willing to resort to physical force to decide the contest. All the means known to man to convey ideas to one another were resorted to, and practised with energy. The press teemed with publications on the subject. The stump-orators were invoked, and the pulpit thundered anathemas against the introduction of slavery. The religious community coupled freedom and christianity together, which was one of the most powerful levers used in the content. At one meeting of the friends of free-



dom in St. Clair county, more than thirty preachers of the gospel attended and opposed the introduction of slavery into the State.

This contest has been further described by W. H. Brown. He says:

The struggle which now commenced, and was continued through the succeeding eighteen months, was one of no ordinary character. Our previous elections had been conducted with warmth and zeal; but into this canvass was infused a bitterness and malignity which the agitation of the Slavery question only engenders. Why it always produces this result, is worthy of the investigation of the moralist and philosopher. Other great evils, political or moral, are discussed with freedom, and measures for their amelioration or prevention meet with no outward opposition; but call in question the right of one man to enslave another, or even make an effort to confine this gigantic sin to the territory in which it exists, and the fiercest passions are aroused in the hearts of its advocates, and the lack of power alone, saves their opponents from utter destruction.

In this spirit was the contest of 1823-4 waged. Old friendships were sundered, families divided and neighborhoods arrayed in opposition to each other. Threats of personal violence were frequent, and personal collisions a frequent occurrence. As in times of warfare, every man expected an attack, and was prepared to meet it. Pistols and dirks were in great demand, and formed a part of the personal habiliments of all those conspicuous for their opposition to the Convention measure. Even the gentler sex came within the vortex of this whirlwind of passion; and many were the angry disputations of those whose cares and interests were usually confined to their household duties.

It will doubtless be profitable, therefore, to study the following letters showing Governor Coles' connection with the anti-slavery movement during the early history of Illinois.

#### GOVERNOR COLES TO RICHARD FLOWERS

*Dear Sir:*—I would have made my acknowledgments to you long since for your kind letter of 13th of February, but for my having been prevented from writing by the bearer of it, from the haste with which he took his departure hence, and for my being much harassed by the business attendant on the approaching ad-

jourment of the Legislature; and for my having gone soon after the adjournment to Edwardsville, where I was detained until a few days since by torrents of rain which have deluged the country and rendered the streams and roads impassable. The perusal of your letter afforded me particular pleasure. It breathes the genuine sentiments of a Republican and of a philanthropist; and produced an emotion which was "pleasing though mournful to the soul." Pleasing that an adopted citizen should possess principles so entirely accordant with our free institutions; and as it held out encouragement that the people would not sanction the late conduct and measures of their Representatives—mournful, that if the slave faction should succeed, how unpleasant and truly unfortunate the situation of many of us, who have removed from a great distance and invested our all in property which we shall be compelled to abandon or to sacrifice, to seek new homes we know not where; or remain in a community whose principles and practice are not only entirely at variance with our own, but of a character calculated daily to harrow up our feelings in the most painful way. I was born in the very bosom of negro slavery; have seen it in all its bearings; reflected well upon the nature of it, and having found it impossible to reconcile it either with my political or religious creed, I abandoned my native State, my aged parents and relations, to seek in this State a community whose principles and practice I presumed were in unison with my own. Judge, then, of my feelings at the efforts which have been made and are now making to change this free community of ours into a truly odious one, consisting of masters and slaves—and you can judge the better as your situation and principles are very similar with mine. The great inducement with us both to emigrate to this State was the firm belief that we should not be disturbed by the clanking of the fetters of Slavery; that tyranny would not be given a legal sanction, nor afforded the food on which it could prey. But the majority of the people's representatives, having by the most violent and unprecedented measure, taken a step with the view of breaking down those barriers to oppression, which had been erected by the wisdom and virtue of those who framed the fundamental law of the State, and which you and many of us considered, if not sacred, at least to have been permanently settled, it becomes us to be on the alert to defeat a measure, which if it should succeed, will not only be ruinous, and in the highest degree unjust to many of us who have emigrated here under the most solemn assurance

that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude" should exist; but it will be of incalculable injury to the interest of the State, of the Union, and of the extension and advancement of freedom, and the amelioration of the human race.

You reside in a favorable situation to aid with effect this great question. The county just below you forms the dividing line between the sections of country in which the free and slave parties predominate. It has occurred to me that the friends of freedom would give ample support, and that the good cause would be greatly promoted by establishing a printing press on the Eastern side of the State. And I know of no place where it could be established to so much advantage, as at Albion. Besides the advantage it has in locality, there are in Albion, and its vicinity, many persons who wield chaste and powerful pens, and who have the means, and, I trust, the disposition of patronizing an establishment of the kind. Pardon me for asking it as a favor to me personally, and as a sacrifice to the furtherance of the best and most virtuous of causes, that all personal, sectional, national, county or town feelings, and all other unkind feelings, let them originate from what cause they may, shall be buried, at least while the great question is pending. I will write and ask the same favor of Mr. Birkbeck. I have but little news. From all I can learn a considerable majority of the people of the counties situated in the north-west part of the State, as far south as Monroe, St. Clair and Washington, are opposed to a call of a convention, but great and extraordinary efforts are already making to induce the people to vote for it.

Present my respectful compliments to Mrs. F. and family, and to your son and his lady, and be assured of my respect and esteem.

EDWARD COLES.

GOVERNOR COLES TO NICHOLAS BIDDLE

*Dear Sir:*—It has been a long time since I either wrote to you or heard from you. I made a visit last summer to my relations in Virginia, and intended to have extended my tour as far as Philadelphia, which I should certainly have done, for I am still more attached to Philadelphia than any other city in the Union, but for my trip having been delayed by a severe attack of bilious fever, and having been prolonged in Virginia beyond the time I expected, and the necessity I was under to be back here by the meeting of the Legislature, to enter on the duties of the office to which I had been recently elected. I assure you, when about to leave Wash-

ington (where I staid only four or five days) and to turn my face to the west, there was a great struggle between a sense of duty which dragged me here, and my inclinations and many strong attractions which drew me to your charming city. There has long existed in this State a strong party in favor of altering the constitution and making it a slave-holding State; while there is another party in favor of a convention to alter the constitution, but deny that Slavery is their object. These two parties have finally, by the most unprecedented and unwarrantable proceedings (an account of which you have no doubt seen in the newspapers), succeeded in passing a resolution requiring the sense of the people to be taken at the next general election (August, 1824), on the propriety of calling a convention for the purpose of altering the constitution. Knowing that this measure would be strenuously urged during the late session of the Legislature, and that many who professed to be hostile to the further introduction of Slavery, would advocate it, and believing that it would have a salutary effect to furnish them an opportunity of evincing the sincerity of their professions; and being also urged by a strong sense of the obligations imposed on me, by my principles and feelings, to take notice of the subject, I called the attention of the Legislature in a speech I delivered on being sworn into office (a printed copy of which I sent you by mail) to the existence of Slavery in the State, in violation of the great fundamental principles of the ordinance, and recommended that just and equitable provision be made for its abrogation. As I anticipated, this part of my speech created a considerable excitement with those who were openly or secretly in favor of making Illinois a slave-holding, rather than making it really as well as nominally, a free State—who wished to fill it rather than empty it of slaves. Never did I see or hear in America of party spirit going to such lengths, as well officially as privately, as it did here on this question. Indeed, it seems to me that Slavery is so poisonous as to produce a kind of delirium in those minds who are excited by it. This question, and the manner of carrying it, is exciting great interest throughout the State, and has already kindled an extraordinary degree of excitement and warmth of feeling, which will no doubt continue to increase until the question is decided. I assure you, I never before felt so deep an interest in any political question. It preys upon me to such a degree, that I shall not be happy or feel at ease until it is settled. It is impossible to foresee the injurious effects resulting to this State of

the unhappy consequences which may arise to the Union, from the success of the slave party in this State. Many of us who immigrated to this State under the solemn assurance that there should exist here "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude," will, if the slave faction succeeds, be compelled to sacrifice or abandon our property and seek new homes, we know not where, or remain in a community whose principles we shall disapprove of, and whose practice will be abhorrent to our feelings. And already we hear disputed the binding effect of the ordinance—the power of Congress to restrict a State, etc., etc., from which I fear, if the introduction of Slavery should be tolerated here, the discussions on the expediency and unconstitutionality of the measure will not in all probability be confined to the citizens of this State. But this is a part of the question too painful for me to dwell on. I trust the good sense and virtue of the citizens of Illinois will never sanction a measure so well calculated to disturb the harmony of the Union and so injurious to its own prosperity and happiness, as well as so directly opposite to the progress of those enlightened and liberal principles which do honor to the age. But to insure this it is necessary that the public mind should be enlightened on the moral and political effects of Slavery. You will confer a particular favor on me and promote the virtuous cause in which I am enlisted, by giving me information, or referring me to the sources from whence I can draw it, calculated to elucidate the general character and effects of Slavery—its moral, political and social effects—facts showing its effects on the price of lands, and general improvement and appearance of a country—of labor both as it respects agriculture and manufactures, etc., etc. The State of Pennsylvania having been long distinguished for its attachment to free principles, there is no doubt but what you can procure in Philadelphia many valuable pamphlets and publications which would throw light on this question. Any which you may have it in your power to procure and forward, will be most thankfully received, and the amount of the expense repaid as soon as it is known. Your old and truly sincere friend,

EDWARD COLES.

TO NICHOLAS BIDDLE, Esq.,  
President of the Bank of the United States,  
Philadelphia.

MR. BIDDLE TO GOVERNOR COLES

PHILADELPHIA, May 20, 1823.

*Dear Sir:* I have just received your friendly letter of the 22nd ult., to which I shall take the first moment of leisure to give a more detailed answer. In the meantime I can only say that I feel most sincerely the embarrassment of your situation, and hope that you may be able to triumph in the good cause. That no effort may be wanting, you shall have all the assistance which I can give or procure. My occupations necessarily absorb so much of my time that I can promise you little on my part, personally, but I have already engaged two of our most active gentlemen familiar with that subject, who will cheerfully and zealously contribute to your support. The first fruit of their labor is the pamphlet accompanying this letter. I have not had time to read it, as I am anxious to forward it without delay, but I understand that it is the latest and best work on the subject, and goes directly to the question of the superiority of free over slave labor. Mrs. B. and Mr. Craig are glad to hear of your prosperity, and desire to be particularly remembered to you.

With great sincerity of regard,  
yrs.,

N. BIDDLE.

EDWARD COLES, ESQ.,  
Vandalia.

MR. BIDDLE TO GOVERNOR COLES

PHILADELPHIA, May 26, 1823.

*My Dear Sir:* My present occupations necessarily engross so much of my time that I can scarcely contribute more than my good wishes to the great cause which so naturally and deeply interests you. It gives me peculiar satisfaction, therefore, to procure for you the correspondence of my friend, Mr. Roberts Vaux, to whom this note is intended to serve as an introduction. Mr. Vaux is a gentleman of education, talents, fortune, leisure and high standing in the community. He feels sensibly all the embarrassments of your situation; he perceives the deep importance of defeating this first effort to extend to the north-western country the misfortunes of the slave population and he is disposed to co-operate warmly and zealously with you. I know of no individual more calculated to render you the most efficient service. He is worthy of all your

confidence, and I recommend to you to yield it to him implicitly, as I am sure it will be repaid by every kindness and every service in his power.

With great esteem and regard,  
yrs.,

N. BIDDLE.

EDWARD COLES, ESQ.,  
Vandalia,  
Illinois.

MR. BIDDLE TO GOVERNOR COLES

PHILADELPHIA, May 26, 1823.

*My Dear Sir:* I have put into the hands of my friend, Mr. Vaux, a note for you which he will accompany with a communication on the subject which now occupies you. Mr. Vaux will be hearty and zealous in the cause, and I really deem it a subject of congratulation to you, to procure the assistance of one who is more able and willing than any individual of my acquaintance to assist you. There is one thing which I wish to add. The Abolition Society of this city, has been the subject, whether justly or not I am unable to determine, of much hostility at a distance, and it would be rather injurious than beneficial to have it supposed that the society was active in the cause which you are supporting. You will therefore understand that neither the Abolition Society nor any other society has the least concern in this matter. The simple fact is that Mr. Vaux, and two or three of his friends, have been so much pleased with your past conduct in relation to Slavery, and have so deep a sense of their duty to resist the extension of that system, that they mean to volunteer in assisting you, without any connections with any set of men, and without any motives which the most honorable might not be proud to avow.

Very sincerely,  
yrs.,

N. BIDDLE.

EDWARD COLES, ESQ.,  
Vandalia,  
Illinois.

PHILADELPHIA, 5 Mo. 27, 1823.

TO EDWARD COLES, ESQ.:

*Esteemed Friend:*—My friend, Nicholas Biddle, has kindly furnished me with a note of introduction to thy correspondence, which

is transmitted by the mail that conveys this letter. I have been induced thus to solicit access to thy notice, because thy conduct in relation to the emancipation of thy slaves could not fail to beget great respect for an individual whose noble, and generous example displayed so much practical wisdom, and Christian benevolence. Nor has it been less gratifying to be informed of thy official efforts to prevent the overthrow of those constitutional barriers, which were erected to protect the State of Illinois, from the moral, and political evils inseparable from domestic slavery.

It is really astonishing, that any part of the inhabitants of your State should wish to introduce a system which is generally reprobated where its effects have been longest known, and from the dominion of which, such of our fellow citizens of the South as are disposed to examine the subject with the gravity which it certainly merits, most anxiously desire to be redeemed.

Notwithstanding, however, the lessons which experience has taught in this respect, it is likely that Illinois will be agitated by the exertions of unreflecting men, and possibly without timely and energetic efforts to counteract their schemes, they may be enabled to persuade a majority of her people to violate their early vows on this subject, and pollute your soil with the blood and tears of slaves.

Feeling as I do, a deep sympathy for thyself, thus threatened with the most unhappy consequences, and desirous that miseries and mischiefs, the amount of which no mind can fully calculate, may be averted from the extensive and fair region of which Illinois forms a part, I would willingly contribute anything in my power, and with these views I offer my own, and the services of a few of my friends, in this interesting cause.

We have thought that benefit might result from making judicious selections from writers whose purpose is to show the iniquity, and impolicy of slavery—these selections to be printed in the *Tract form* (at our own expense) and forwarded to Illinois for gratuitous distribution. If this plan should meet thy approbation, I should be glad to receive an early intimation to that effect, but should thy official station, or duties, render it either improper or inconvenient for thee to take an active part in this business, perhaps it will be in thy power to select a few individuals who may be disposed to aid us, and in that event, I shall be obliged by thy introduction of such persons to my correspondence.

Accept the salutation of my respect,

ROBERTS VAUX.



EDWARDSVILLE, ILLINOIS, June 27, 1823.

*Esteemed Friend:*

Your kind and highly interesting letter of the 27th ult. was rec'd by the last mail, and has been perused with very great pleasure. The benevolent sentiments you express, and the correct views you take of the great question which is now unfortunately agitating this State, and the deep interest you evince for the prosperity and happiness of Illinois, and the preservation of the rights and liberty of its inhabitants, do credit alike to the native benevolence of your heart and to those divine and political principles which distinguish the real Christian and Republican, and cannot fail to present a contrast, which, however mortifying it may be to me as an Illinoisan, cannot but be highly gratifying to me as a man, to see one so far removed from the scene, and without any other interest except that which he feels in the general happiness of his species, nobly and generously volunteering his services to assist in promoting the cause of humanity, whilst there are thousands here strenuously advocating the giving a legal sanction to the oppression and abject slavery of their fellow-creatures. Such noble, generous, and fervid benevolence as yours, is highly honorable even to a *Friend*; and is a new and striking proof of that extended philanthropy, and pure and heaven-born spirit of Brotherly love, by which that denomination of Christians have ever been distinguished, and cannot fail to excite the admiration and win the confidence and attachment of all—especially of those like myself, who daily experience pain and mortification in hearing doctrines advanced which are directly in opposition to the great fundamental truths of our religious and political creeds.

In behalf of the friends of freedom in this State, I give you sincere and grateful thanks for the offer of your services to assist us to enlighten the minds of our fellow citizens, by publishing judicious selections and observations on the iniquity and impolicy of Slavery, in *tract form*, and distributing them gratuitously through the State. It may be proper, however, to remark that distant friends should be cautious in the manner of making their benevolent exertions, as there is danger that designing partisans here may not only paralyze the effort, but turn it against the cause it was intended to promote, by representing it to be the interference of other States for the purpose of influencing the opinion of the people of this. An ingenious pen could dress up this subject in a

manner to give it great effect in this country. Would it not, therefore, be best not to state on the face of the publications where they were printed? They could be printed in Philadelphia, and sent with the goods of some merchant of St. Louis at a much less expense than by mail.

Not being aware of any consideration which should restrain me, but on the contrary believing that my present office increases the obligations I am under, as a good citizen, to exert myself to enlighten the minds of my fellow citizens, and strenuously to oppose every measure which I am convinced is unjust in principle or injurious in its effects, and believing Slavery to be both iniquitous and impolitic, I conceive myself bound, both as a citizen and as an officer, to do all in my power to prevent its introduction into this State. I will therefore cheerfully render you assistance in distributing any publications you may forward, or give you any information you may desire.

The friends of freedom here propose making publication similar to those you suggest, but they will not have the same means of doing justice to the subject that you will have in Philadelphia. We are particularly anxious, not only to present to the people proper views of the immoral and anti-christian, unjust and anti-republican character of Slavery, but also *facts* showing its impolicy and injurious effects in retarding the settlement and prosperity of the State, by checking emigration to it, and paralyzing the enterprise and activity of its citizens—that it would impede the progress of manufactures, be prejudicial to agriculture, and in one word, to the future prosperity, as well as to the immediate interest of the State. The great argument here in favor of the introduction and toleration of Slavery, is that it would have the immediate effect of raising the price of lands, and adding to the population and wealth of the country. We want *facts* to disprove these assertions, and also to show that Slavery would operate to the injury of the poor or laboring classes of society. Strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that there are many persons who are in principle opposed to Slavery who will yet vote for making this a slaveholding State, under the belief that by so doing they will be enabled to make an immediate and advantageous sale of their lands, and thus gratify that restless and rambling disposition which is so common with frontier settlers.

Pardon this long and hasty letter. Give my regards to our

mutual friend Biddle, and be assured that your generous benevolence has inspired me with great respect and sincere regard for you.

EDWARD COLES.

ROBERTS VAUX,  
Philadelphia.

ROBERTS VAUX TO GOVERNOR COLES

BIRWOOD LODGE (NEAR PHIL'A), 7 Mo. 24, 1823.

*Esteemed Friend*:—I cannot delay an immediate acknowledgment of thy letter of the 27th ultimo, which reached me at my summer residence to-day.

It affords me unfeigned satisfaction to learn from it that thee approves the plan which I submitted for thy consideration. Anticipating a favorable notice of the suggestion, by a mind so devoted as thine to the promotion of the great ends of humanity, of justice, and of National honor, three pamphlets were prepared, which will be immediately printed, and transmitted to thy address at St. Louis. One of these tracts is designed to show the impolicy and unprofitableness of Slave Labor, etc., and some arguments are drawn from the published opinions of several distinguished citizens of the *slave-holding States*; among which Col. Taylor's are not the least authoritative and cogent. Another essay exhibits a succinct account of the cruelties of the Slave Trade, derived from authentic sources; and a third pamphlet is intended to show that the interminable bondage of any portion of the human race is, on the part of the oppressors, a flagrant violation of natural and Divine Justice, and utterly inconsistent with the doctrines of our Holy Redeemer.

Aware of the unpopularity of Philadelphia, and especially of *Quaker* sentiments on this particular topic, with all those who attempt to justify slavery, it was originally determined to avoid giving any complexion whatever to these publications which might induce the belief that they proceeded from this State, or that individuals of the Society of Friends had any agency in the preparation of them. The coincidence of our judgment in regard to the manner of treating the subject is worthy of remark.

If the least benefit results from this humble effort, it will administer to my happiness, which will be augmented by the reflection, that it owes its origin to thy own emphatic summons for aid, in a cause which demands the exercise of every generous and patriotic feeling.

That indulgent Heaven may crown thy labors with success, is the sincere desire of thy friend.

With great truth and respect,

ROBERTS VAUX.

TO EDWARD COLES, ESQUIRE,  
Governor of Illinois,  
Edwardsville, Illinois.

P. S.—On my next visit to the city, I intend to communicate thy message to our friend Nicholas Biddle.

R. V.

GOVERNOR COLES TO MR. BIDDLE

EDWARDSVILLE, Sept. 18, 1823.

*Dear Sir:*—I have been long anxious to return you my thanks for your kind letter of May 20th and 26th, and also for the acceptable service you rendered me in making me known to Mr. Vaux, from whom I have had the pleasure of receiving two letters, and a promise of his assistance in preventing our soil from being polluted with the foul and disgraceful stain of slavery. The disinterested and praiseworthy zeal he evinces is as honorable to him, as it is gratifying to me, and is well calculated not only to give me an exalted opinion of his character, but to awaken the most lively feelings of regard and friendship for him. I wish, when you see him, you would tender him my kind regards and thanks for his letter of July 24, and say to him, I hope soon to receive the packages promised. The propriety of calling a convention, or more properly speaking, of making this a slave-holding State, is still discussed with considerable warmth, and continues to engage the undivided attention of the people, being the constant theme of conversation in every circle, and every newspaper teems with no other subject. Unfortunately for the friends of freedom, four out of five of the newspapers printed in this State are opposed to them; and the only press whose editor is in favor of freedom, although a pretty smart editor, has rendered himself unpopular with many by his foolish and passionate attacks upon many of the prominent men on his side of the question. If, however, the advocates of Slavery have the advantage of us in printing presses, we have greatly the advantage of them in possessing men of the most talents, and most able to wield the pen and use the press, with effect; and as three out of four of their presses have professed

a willingness to admit well-written original essays on both sides of the question, we shall have not only the best of the argument, but be able, I trust, to present it in the best dress to the public. I am happy in telling you that the advocates of a convention have been losing ground ever since the adjournment of the Legislature; and there is no doubt with me if the question were now to be decided, that a majority of the people would be opposed to it. But what will be the state of the parties next August is another question. Many of the people in this State are very fickle and credulous, and much can be done by designing and unprincipled partisans, and that everything which can possibly be done will be done, we cannot but infer from the extraordinary and unwarrantable measures resorted to last winter in the Legislature in getting up the question, and the great anxiety evinced, and exertions which have been made and are still making to prevail on the people to sanction it. But as the friends of freedom are aware of this, they will watch the movements of their opponents, and be on the alert to counteract their intrigues and machinations. The object for which a convention is wanted is so justly odious, and the conduct of the friends of the measure so disgraceful, that I cannot bring myself to believe they will succeed. But I regret to state that the advocates of Slavery in this State are gaining strength, from the indiscretion of the advocates of freedom out of the State. Certain leading newspapers in the Atlantic cities have taken a stand, and held language which is used here in a way calculated to do much mischief. Whether we have the constitutional right to make this a slave-holding State, or not, or whether the opponents of the extension of Slavery, here or elsewhere, may think proper hereafter to call for the interposition of the Federal Gov't to restrain the people of this State, it is certainly bad policy at this time very strongly to urge it, and especially in what may be considered dictatorial language; as it is of all other questions the best calculated to arouse the feelings of State pride, and State rights, and that natural love of unrestrained liberty and independence which is common to our countrymen, and especially to our frontier settlers, who of all men in the world have the strongest jealousy of authority and aversion to restraint.

I wish, my friend, you would use your influence to prevail on the newspaper writers to let this question alone for the present. If they are sincere in their opposition to the further extension of Slavery, they will not prematurely urge it, when they are assured that by so doing they can do no good, but much harm.

I shall go to St. Louis in a day or two, when I hope to have the pleasure of seeing and congratulating your brother on his late marriage, and becoming acquainted with his lady. This has been the most cool and agreeable, and by far the most healthful summer I have ever seen in this country. The spring was too wet and we were apprehensive of an unfavorable season both for health and vegetation, but we have been most agreeably disappointed. My health was never better. I beg you to present my kind regards to Mrs. B., and to Mr. Craig, and to be assured of my sincere regard.

EDWARD COLES.

NICHOLAS BIDDLE, ESQ.,

President of the Bank of the U. S.—Philadelphia.

P. S.—Could you or Mr. Vaux furnish me with an assessment of lands in the different counties of Pennsylvania? I want to show that lands are higher in price in free than slave States.

GOVERNOR COLES TO ROBERTS VAUX

VANDALIA, ILLINOIS, December 11, 1823.

*Esteemed Friend:*—I received some time since your letter of the 11th of Oct., and by the last mail yours of the 4th ulto. An unusual press of public business prevented my sooner acknowledging the former, and will now prevent my making as long an answer to the two as I desire. For the last four weeks there has been a great crowd of persons here, attending the Circuit and Supreme Court of the State, and the U. S. and District Court and the sale at auction for taxes of about 7,000 tracts of land, belonging to non-resident proprietors. This has necessarily given me much to do; but it has at the same time afforded me an excellent opportunity of collecting the sense of the people on the great question which is now agitating the State. And I am happy in assuring you, from the best information I have been able to collect from all parts of the State, I am more confirmed in my belief that a majority of the people will be opposed to calling a convention for the purpose of altering the Constitution so as to make this a slave-holding State. But the extraordinary efforts that have been made here during the last three or four weeks by the friends of Slavery, in organizing their party, and enabling its leaders to act with the most concert and effect, convince the friends of freedom that their opponents are yet in the field, and that they should be on the alert, for fear by some *ruse de guerre*, at which their opponents are known from

sad experience to be great adepts, the advocates of oppression should triumph. Nearly all the leading friends of a convention have been assembled here, and held caucuses for the purpose of deliberating upon the best means of promoting the success of their favorite measure; have adopted sundry resolutions, and made many arrangements; among others have appointed committees for each county in the State, and requested that the county committees appoint a committee in each township, for the purpose of corresponding with each other, and of influencing by every possible means the public opinion.

With respect to your inquiry whether there is not some more expeditious and safe mode of sending out the pamphlets than through a commercial house at St. Louis, I can think of no other, except to forward them, as pamphlets, by mail to me to this place, which is at this season of the year slow and precarious.

The pamphlet you forwarded me by mail, along with your last letter, I received safe; but have been so busy as not yet to have had time to read it. Two thousand of each kind, will, I presume, be enough, and as many as I shall be able conveniently to distribute. There will be for the next six months, so few persons visiting this place, that I shall be compelled to rely chiefly on the mails, as the means of distributing pamphlets, or other information to the public. If possible, I intend to have all the pamphlets published in one or more of our weekly newspapers.

Accompanying this I send you a pamphlet, which has been lately published by my old friend Birkbeck, which is by far the best publication which has been yet given to the public. After you have perused it, you will confer a favor on me to loan it for the perusal of our mutual friend Biddle, to whom I beg you to present my kind regards.

With great respect and sincere regards, your friend,

EDWARD COLES.

To ROBERTS VAUX,  
Philadelphia.

We have had the misfortune (two days since) to lose our State House by fire. This accident will operate in favor of a convention. Many profess to be opposed to slavery but in favor of a convention to remove the seat of Government. There is now of course less inducement for keeping it here. I still, however, hope and believe we shall have no convention.

## MORRIS BIRKBECK TO GOVERNOR COLES

WANBOROUGH, Dec. 6, 1823.

*Dear Sir:* \* \* \* \* \*

I take the liberty by this mail to send you half a dozen; and if, on reading a copy, you should think it may be useful to any of the unconverted Conventionists, you may put it in their way. I am glad you think favorably of the course the question is taking. I believe the advocates of a Convention are not so numerous as they have been on this side of the State. The leaders do not seem to be so sanguine. This may, however, be a *ruse de guerre* preparatory to a grand push in the spring. I am rejoiced that you have escaped from sickness this summer. My family has enjoyed excellent health, and the neighborhood—as heretofore. We should be glad to see you amongst us; and a friendly visit from you would give me peculiar pleasure. I have not seen Mr. Pell since the morning, when I received your letter. I shall deliver your message to him, and I beg you to believe me your sincere friend,

M. BIRKBECK.

To GOVERNOR COLES,  
Vandalia.

## GOVERNOR COLES TO MORRIS BIRKBECK

VANDALIA, January 29, 1824.

*My Dear Sir:*—I had the pleasure to receive, in due course of mail, your letter of the 6th ulto., together with six of your pamphlets, which you were so good as to send me, for which I return you my thanks. I had previously seen republished in a newspaper your pamphlet, and had read it with great pleasure. I could not but wish every Conventionist in the State had it and was compelled to read it with attention. Our society at Edwardsville intends having another and large edition of it reprinted for the purpose of having it extensively circulated. I took the liberty to send one or two of your pamphlets to some distant and particular friends, who take a deep interest in the Slave question in this State. By the by, should not the review of your pamphlet, which appeared first in the Illinois Gazette, and since republished in all the Convention papers of the State, be noticed? It is very ingeniously written, but what more particularly requires correction is the fabrications and misrepresentations of facts. One or two of these



were hastily noticed and sent to be inserted last week in the paper published here; but no paper has since issued from the press.

During the setting of the Courts, and the sale of the lands of non-residents for taxes, we had a considerable number of persons assembled here from almost every part of the State; and a pretty good opportunity was afforded of collecting the public sentiment in relation to the great question which is now convulsing the State. The friends of a Convention pretended to be pleased; but it was very apparent they were not; and the more honest and liberal among them acknowledged that they thought their prospects bad. Our friends on the other hand were much pleased, and rendered much more sanguine of success from the information they received. The friends of Slavery, however, were caucusing nearly every night, and made many arrangements for their electioneering campaign. Among others, it is said, they have appointed five persons in each county, with a request that these five appoint three in each election precinct, for the purpose of diffusing their doctrines, embodying their forces, and acting with the greatest concert and effort. This is well calculated to bring their strength to bear in the best possible manner, and should, as far as possible, be counteracted. When bad men conspire, good men should be watchful.

The friends of a Convention appear to become more and more bitter and virulent in their enmity to me, and seem determined not only to injure my standing with the people, but to break down my pecuniary resources. A suit has been lately instituted at Edwardsville against me for the recovery of the sum of \$200 for *each* negro emancipated by me and brought into this State. The suit has been brought under a law passed on the 30th of March, 1819, but which was not printed or promulgated until the October following. In the meantime, that is about the first week of May, my negroes emigrated to and settled in this State. What is truly farcical in this suit is, that a poor worthless fellow, who has no property, and of course pays no tax, has been selected to institute it, from the fear he has of being taxed to support the negroes I emancipated, when they, who are all young and healthy, are so prosperous as to possess comfortable livings, and some of them pay as much as four dollars a year tax on their property. I should indeed, my friend, be unfortunate were I now compelled to pay \$200 for each of my negroes, big and little, dead and living (for the suit goes to this) after the sacrifices I have made, and my efforts to befriend and enable them to live comfortably. For I not only emancipated

all my negroes, which amounted to one-third of all the property my father bequeathed me, but I removed them out here at an expense of between five and six hundred dollars, and then gave each head of a family, and all others who had passed the age of 24, one hundred and sixty acres of land each, and exerted myself to prevail on them to be honest, industrious and correct in their conduct. This they have done in a remarkable degree, so much so, with all the prejudice against free negroes, there never has been the least ground for charge or censure against any one of them. And now, for the first time in my life, to be sued for what I thought was generous and praiseworthy conduct, creates strange feelings, which, however, cease to give me personal mortification, when I reflect on the character and motives of those who have instituted it.

Just about the time this suit was instituted, I had the misfortune to lose by fire two-thirds of all the buildings and enclosures on my farm, together with about 200 apple trees and as many peach trees—several of each kind large enough to bear fruit. And soon after, the "State House" having been consumed by fire, a project was set on foot to rebuild it by subscription. Not liking the plan and arrangements, I declined subscribing, and proposed others, which I thought would be more for the interest of the State, of the county, and of the town—and which by the way are now generally admitted would have been best. This however was immediately laid hold of by some of the factious Conventionists who being aware that the loss of the State House would operate to the injury of their favorite measure in *this county*, and being anxious to display great solicitude for the interest of the people here, and that too, as much as possible at the expense of the anti-Conventionists, they busied themselves in misrepresenting to the multitude my reasons and motives for not subscribing my name to their paper, and with the aid of large potions of whiskey, contrived to get up a real *vandal* mob, who vented their spleen against me, in the most noisy and riotous manner, nearly all night, for my opposition to a convention and for my refusal as they termed it, to rebuild the State House. All this and other instances of defamation and persecution, create in my bosom opposite feelings; one of pain, the other of pleasure. Pain to see my fellow man so ill-natured and vindictive merely because I am the friend of my species, and am opposed to one portion oppressing another—pleasure that I should be in a situation which enables me to render services to the just and good cause in which we are engaged; and so far

from repining at these indignities and persecutions, I am thankful to Providence for placing me in the van of this eventful contest, and giving me a temper, zeal, and resolution which I trust will enable me to bear with fortitude the peltings which are inseparable from it. In conclusion, I pray you to do me the justice to believe, that no dread of personal consequences will ever abate my efforts to promote the good of the public, much less to abandon the great fundamental principles of civil and personal liberty—and to be assured of my sincere friendship.

EDWARD COLES.

MORRIS BIRKBECK, ESQ.,  
Wanborough, Edwards County.

MR. BIRKBECK TO GOVERNOR COLES

WANBOROUGH, Feb. 19, 1824.

*My Dear Sir:*—I have just received your letter of January 29, and I assure you the receiving of it has given me unfeigned pleasure, although its contents, as far as the unworthy conduct of the party is productive of vexation to you, I as sincerely lament. I am sorry that it should be at your expense; but as it tends to expose the badness of the cause and the iniquity of its supporters, the friends of liberty and virtue can hardly regret that they should have thus displayed their true characters.

For myself, my private situation screens me in great measure from persecution, though I presume, not from the honor of their hatred. I am glad, you approve my little pamphlet; if I could afford it I would spare the society at Edwardsville the expense of republishing, &c. I have the satisfaction of knowing that it has done some good, by changing the sentiments of several, who through want of reflection or knowledge, had been advocates of Slavery. And as there are many up and down in all parts of the State, who are in that situation, I trust its general circulation will be useful. I am continually plying the Slave party, through the Illinois Gazette, with popular discussions and sometimes with legal arguments, under the signature of Jonathan Freeman, and some others. You will see, if you read that paper, an ironical proposal of a plan for raising a fund to colonize the negroes as an appendage to limited Slavery, signed J., which I think may show the absurdity of that argument. The Edwardsville Spectator published about a dozen of those short letters, and I suppose that you will see a few

more of them shortly. As they present the question in various lights, pointing out the wickedness and folly of the slave scheme, dissected as it were into distinct portions, I imagine they make an impression on some readers more effectually than a continued course of argument. I submit, with great deference, a thought that some of these would be useful if published by way of appendix to the *Appeal*. Perhaps you will revert to them, and notice a few more which you will soon see; then do as you see good.

As *publication* is essential to the binding power of a law, in fact to its existence *as law*, you will of course defeat your persecutors, and put them to shame, on the principle of *ex post facto*. You could not infringe in May a law promulgated in October following.

The fire at Vandalia is rather against the Conventionists in that quarter. The idea of re-building the State House by subscription, you, as governor, could hardly countenance. What authority have individuals to act in this case, even at their own expense? And what claim have they on your private purse? I am only sorry for your personal vexation under these attacks. They discover the weakness and folly of the party, and I am in hopes they are losing ground. They have great zeal and activity and no delicacy about the means; there is considerable zeal and activity on our side; and setting the good principles of our cause against their total want of principle, I trust we are a match for them, provided we do not relax in our efforts. The attack on my pamphlet by Americanus (who is Mr. Webb of Bonpas), seems to the Illinois Gazette a short reply to the personalities; further I thought needless, and have just written another to the same effect, which I shall send to the Vandalia paper. Not being presumed to know the author, some severity of retort seems allowable.

You have a circle at Vandalia chiefly, I fear, of the wrong sort in regard to the vital question, which circumstance must detract from your social enjoyment, where at best it could ill be spared. The cause in which you are engaged so heartily is so thoroughly good that it will bear you up through many sacrifices and privations. Your sentiments on the subject rejoice and encourage me, and in return (pedantry as it may seem) I shall give you a sentiment from Horace for *your* encouragement.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The last paragraph of Mr. Birkbeck's letter cannot but excite admiration. The quotation from Horace applied with great force to the case of Governor Coles:

Justum et tenacem propositi virum,  
 Non civium ardor prava jubentium,  
 Non vultus instantis tyranni,  
 Mente quatit solida.

I remain, with great esteem, yours,

M. BIRKBECK.

MORRIS BIRKBECK, Esq.,  
 Wanborough.

I had hoped after the great and decided majority which was given at the late election against a Convention, my political enemies would have ceased to persecute me. But in this I was mistaken. It would seem I must be sacrificed. Nothing short of my entire ruin will satisfy my enemies, and they seem determined to effect it without regard to the means. Yesterday the suit which has been instituted against me for freeing my negroes was called up for trial. Judge Reynolds not only decided several points of law against me, in opposition to the opinion of several of the best lawyers in the State, but he and Mr. Turney rejected *all* my testimony as illegal, and would not permit a solitary word to be uttered by a witness of mine. Under such circumstances the jury found a verdict of \$2,000 against me, which, with the cost, will be a difficult sum for me to raise, these hard times. I shall ask for a new trial. If this application should share the fate of all others I have made, it is to be hoped he will not assume the power to prevent my taking an appeal to the Supreme Court.

In haste, your friend,

ED. COLES.

GOVERNOR COLES TO ROBERTS VAUX

VANDALIA, Jan'y 21, 1824.

*My Friend*:—While at Edwardsville a few days since, I received a letter from D. B. Smith, notifying me that he had forwarded to the care of I. I. Smith & Co., of St. Louis, certain pamphlets; previous to which, however, I had been informed by one of that company that he expected them, and had requested him to notify me so soon as they should be received, and to forward them to me to

“Neither the ardor of citizens ordering base things, nor the face of the threatening tyrant shakes a man just and tenacious of principle from his firm intentions.”

this place by the first safe opportunity. I also had the pleasure to receive at Edwardsville the pamphlet you were so good as to enclose me by mail. The information contained in this pamphlet in relation to the foreign slave trade, is highly interesting. I must, however, be allowed to express my regret that it does not bear more directly on the question, which is now agitating us here, by showing the resemblance between the *foreign* and *domestic* slave trade, and the inevitable effect of the extension of Slavery into new regions, to continue and increase this odious traffic. To add to the circulation of this, as well as the pamphlet I had previously the pleasure to receive from you, I shall, if possible, prevail on some of the editors to publish them in their newspapers. But unfortunately for our cause, of the five newspapers printed in this State, four are the avowed advocates of Slavery (in other words for a Convention) and but one of Freedom, and that one not friendly to me and other opponents of the Convention. This division among us arises from factions, personal and local feelings, and from the circumstance that we have many avowed friends of freedom, who are themselves the masters of slaves; and who, while they unite with us in opposing the means of the further introduction of Slavery, are at the same time violently opposed to our efforts to abolish the remnant of Slavery which is still allowed to stain our soil. There is also another class among us who profess to be opposed to Slavery and who rail much against it, but yet who are friendly to it, as is fully evinced by their advocating every measure calculated to introduce and tolerate it here. The character and feelings of these several classes of our citizens were strongly exemplified last winter, when, on entering into office, I called the attention of the Legislature to the existence of Slavery among us, and urged its abolition. As it may be the means of throwing some light on the slave question in this State, I will send you, accompanying this letter, a printed copy of my speech, and a report made by a committee of the Legislature on a part of it.

My remarks and recommendation on the subject of Slavery produced a great excitement among those who held slaves, or were desirous of holding them, particularly among those advocates of a Convention who were professedly the opponents of Slavery, but secretly its friends, and who hoped under the fair mask of freedom, to deceive the people and to smuggle in the monster Slavery. Bringing forward the measure of abolition at the same time they

brought forward the Convention question, placed these professed friends to the rights of man in an awkward situation, for it was apparent if they voted agreeable to their declarations, they, together with the real and genuine friends of freedom, would constitute a majority of the Legislature, and of course pass the abolition Bill. This state of things had the effect of unmasking their true opinions and views, and of clearly exhibiting to the public the real object for which a convention was to be called—that of making this a Slave-holding State. . . .

Having had the good fortune, through every period of my life, to live in great harmony with my fellow man, the enmity and persecution I have lately had to encounter, have created a new state of feeling, and caused me to look into my own conduct to see whether it has been correct. In this review I have been gratified to find I have not given just cause of offense to any one; but I have been grieved to perceive with what virulence I have been pelted, when the only complaint against me is, that I am a friend to the equal rights of man, and am considered a barrier to my opponents acquiring the power of oppressing their fellow man. Under this view of my situation, I am gratified that Providence has placed me in the van of this great contest; and I am truly thankful that my system is so organized as to leave no room for doubt fear or hesitation. My opinions have long since been maturely formed, and my course deliberately taken, and is not now to be changed by detraction, prosecutions, or threats of "*Convention or death.*"

I beg you excuse my troubling you with the perusal of so long a letter, and that you will pardon me for having said so much of myself, in consideration of its connection with the great question now agitating this State, by interesting yourself in which you have displayed so signal and praiseworthy an instance of your benevolence—for which I pray you to accept the grateful thanks of your friend,

EDWARD COLES.

Answering this January 21, 1824, Mr. Vaux said:

The part which thee has been called to act, privately as well as publicly and officially, in regard to the rights of mankind, and for the upholding of the principles of justice and mercy toward a degraded and oppressed portion of our fellow beings, ought to be

regarded as a manifestation of Providential power, concerning which we must always believe the same Divine interposition will be extended in every exigency. I am altogether satisfied that it is reserved for thee to witness the triumph of truth and beneficence in the struggle to which thee has been exposed; and, what is of infinitely greater value, as it respects thyself, to reap a plentiful harvest in the most precious of all rewards, the approbation of Heaven!

I feel a deep interest in thy character, and a lively gratitude for thy service, and it will always be among the purest consolations of my mind to be assured of thy welfare and happiness.

ROBERTS VAUX TO GOVERNOR COLES

*Esteemed Friend:*—My delay in the acknowledgment of the receipt of thy truly interesting letter of Jan'y 21, last, will not, I trust, be attributed to any want of respect and kindness, but to the real causes, which were, first, an unusual press of business relative to several public institutions, which at the season of the receipt of that communication demanded my attention; and secondly, to the expectation subsequently entertained here, that thy presence might be expected at Washington as successor in the Senate of the United States to N. Edwards, appointed on a foreign mission. The likelihood that the latter event might bring us to a *personal* acquaintance in this city, when the session of Congress should terminate, was contemplated with pleasure, since a direct interchange of opinion would be preferred to epistolary correspondence. Time, however, has served to show that this prospect, with many others upon which we dwell with satisfaction, failed of realization, and I therefore avail myself of the only means which are left to renew the assurance of my remembrance, of my undissembled regard, and of my sincere sympathy. The part which thee has been called to act privately as well as publicly, and officially, in regard to the rights of mankind, and for the upholding of the principles of justice, and mercy toward a degraded and oppressed portion of our fellow beings, ought to be regarded as a manifestation of Providential power, concerning which we must always believe the same Divine interposition will be extended in every exigency. I am altogether satisfied that it is reserved for thee to witness the triumph of truth and beneficence in the struggle to which thee has been exposed;



and, what is of infinitely greater value, as it respects thyself, to reap a plenteous harvest in the most precious of all rewards, the approbation of Heaven!

I feel a deep interest in thy character, and a lively gratitude for thy services, and it will always be among the purest consolations of my mind to be assured of thy welfare and happiness; with these impressions I salute thee, and remain faithfully,

Thy Friend,

ROBERTS VAUX.

To EDWARD COLES,  
Governor of Illinois.

P. S.—I yesterday passed half and hour with our friend, N. Biddle; he is well, but very much occupied with official duties at the bank.

ROBERTS VAUX TO GOVERNOR COLES

*Dear Friend:* The last intelligence from Philadelphia is, that the great question which has so long agitated your State, and which had a bearing so important upon the common interests of humanity, and justice, has been determined. Happy for your commonwealth! Creditable for our country! Slavery will not be permitted to overrun Illinois! The result of the conflict is truly joyous; you have said to the moral plague, "*Thus far, but no farther, shalt thou come.*"

My warmest congratulations are tendered on this great event, though I know how inferior all exterior circumstances must be in comparison with the heart-solacing reward which is reaped by thy devotedness in this noble cause.

Since I have been at my summer residence, I have received several numbers of an Illinois newspaper, and a pamphlet from the same quarter, all which contained highly interesting matter relative to the question then undecided in your State; I presume I am indebted to thy kindness for those documents, for which I feel greatly obliged. The letter of Thos. Jefferson addressed to thyself, is very interesting, and I have it in contemplation to cause it to be printed in a tract form, for general distribution, provided such use of it, may be altogether agreeable to thee.

I have indulged myself with a hope that it may be within the range of probability, that thee will make a visit to Philadelphia ere long. Not anything would give me more pleasure than thy presence

in our city, and that gratification would be increased by thy making my house thy home. I have much more to communicate than I have leisure now to put on paper, as we are today preparing to return, on the morrow, to our house in town.

With sincere regard I remain thy friend,

ROBERTS VAUX.

GOVERNOR COLES TO ROBERTS VAUX

*My Dear Sir:*—When I had the happiness to enjoy your society last summer in Philadelphia, you were so kind as to express a wish to hear from me on my return to this State. I should long since have fulfilled the promise then made you to comply with this request which I felt was as flattering to me, as it was kind in you; but for a mass of business which had accumulated during my absence, the preparation for the meeting, and the labor and interruption attendant on the session of the Legislature, which adjourned a few days since; and the novel and extraordinary efforts made by some of my old political opponents to supplant me in the office of Governor, by thrusting in my place the Lieutenant-Governor a zealous and thorough-going advocate of Slavery. I had heard nothing of this intention (for although many letters were written to me, it so happened not one ever came to hand, or has since been heard of) until I reached Louisville on my way home, when I was told by a friend that he had been informed by a distinguished opponent of mine that it had been determined that I should not be permitted to resume the office of Governor. On my arriving in the State, I found that there had been several caucuses held in different places, by what are called the knowing ones, for the purpose of devising the best mode of proceeding, and of organizing their forces to act against me. All the Executive officers of the State recognizing me as Governor, I found no difficulty in entering at once on the duties of the office. The Lieutenant-Governor, however, still remained at the seat of Gov't, contending that I had vacated the office by my absence from the State, and that he was, under the constitution, the acting Governor. On the meeting of the Supreme Court, he applied for a mandamus against the Secretary of State. The court refused the mandamus on an incidental point, and got rid of the main question without deciding it. Soon after this the General Assembly met, and efforts were made to induce it to recognize the

Lieutenant as the acting Governor; but these efforts having failed, he made a communication to both Houses, setting forth his claims to the office of Governor, and asking to be heard by himself or counsel in support of them. Nothing was done with this communication, there being only *one* member in *each* House openly in favor of the Lieutenant-Governor's pretensions. There would doubtless have been more if there had been any prospect of ousting me. I attribute the unexpected unanimity to the circumstance of the question having been stirred in time to afford the people an opportunity of making known their opinions and feelings to their Representatives previous to their leaving home to take their seats in the Legislature. The current of public opinion on this question was too strong in my favor to be resisted by any but a most desperate antagonist. This effort of my opponents has recoiled very much to my advantage, in weakening their popularity, and adding to the strength of mine.

You will recollect my having shown you last summer some strictures, which I had been induced to publish on the judge's opinion in the malicious suit which had been instituted against me for freeing my negroes, in consequence of several extraordinary errors of fact, as well as of law, which it contained, and the unusual pains taken by the judge to publish and circulate these errors to my injury. Two actions have been instituted against me for this publication—one by the court—the other in the name of the judge as an individual, in which he has laid his damages at \$5,000. The former is to be tried at Edwardsville next month—the latter at this place in April. The original suit, or mother of the judge's twin-suits, is still pending in our Supreme Court, and is expected will be decided at the June term. I trust I shall get rid of all of these suits in the course of the spring and summer. I feel the more anxious to do so as they are the first suits, that ever were instituted against me.

I have not heard anything of the pamphlets which you were so good as to promise to send me. I shall go to St. Louis in about a month, when I hope to receive them. I see noticed in the public prints a new pamphlet, published by G. and C. Carville, at New York, on the emancipation and removal of the slaves of the U. S. If you could conveniently lay your hands on this pamphlet, you would confer a favor on me by sending it to me by mail. May I ask the favor of you to hand to Mr. Fry the enclosed five dollar

note, and request him to forward the National Gazette to William Wilson (Chief Justice of the State), Carmi, White county, Illinois.

I beg you to present my kind regards to Mrs. Vaux, and to accept my grateful acknowledgments for your very kind and truly friendly attentions to me while in Philadelphia; and permit me again to renew to you the assurance of my obligations to you for the services rendered to humanity and to Illinois during the late vile effort to prostitute their rights and character and to repeat that the virtuous and benevolent interest you evinced on that occasion will ever endear you to

EDWARD COLES.

GOVERNOR COLES TO A. COWLES

*Dear Sir:*—Believing that I should have been able to prove that I had not libeled Judge McRoberts, and explain how the Grand Jury had been induced to present me for so doing, it was with great regret that I heard you had thought proper to dismiss the prosecution. Fearing that some malicious person may misrepresent this transaction at some future day, when those who now understand it may have forgotten many of the details in relation to it, or perhaps be dead, or have removed from the country, I have determined to ask the favor of you to give me a written answer to the following questions:

Did you summon or request Judge McRoberts to appear before the Grand Jury, which presented me for libeling him?

Did not Judge McRoberts request to see the indictment before it was delivered to the Grand Jury, and did he not examine and alter it, and if so what were the alterations made by him?

Did you ask Mr. Blackwell to aid you in the prosecution of me, and do you know whether he was employed by Judge McRoberts to do so?

As you have expressed the opinion verbally to several persons, that I had not libeled Judge McRoberts, I ask the favor of you to give me your opinion in writing, whether the matter contained in the indictment was a libel?

With great respect, I am &c., &c.,

EDWARD COLES.

A. COWLES, ESQ.,  
Circuit Attorney,  
Edwardsville.

P. S.—Why was not Judge McRoberts returned as a witness, on the back of the indictment?

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER FROM GOVERNOR COLES TO JOHN  
RUTHERFORD

I give you many thanks, my dear Sir, for your long and truly affectionate letter of February, and assure you, I feel great contrition for having so long delayed the expression of them, and of saying how much gratified I was at perusing your kind letter, and the glad tidings it gave me of the health and happiness of our dear Emily and her little ones; and also the pleasure I have since derived at finding from the newspapers in what a flattering manner your fellow citizens have elected you to represent them in the Legislature.

I am greatly gratified at your election, not only from the regard I have for you as a man, &c., and the consequent interest I take in, and the pleasure I derive from your success; but I am particularly so in seeing men of your principles in relation to negro Slavery in the Councils of Virginia, as it cheers me with the hope that something will soon be done to repudiate the unnatural connection which has there so long existed between the freest of the free and the most slavish of slaves.

Even if it were feasible, from the extraordinary apathy in the great mass of the people, and the zeal displayed by many to perpetuate the evil, I could not hope for speedy emancipation, but I do trust for the honor as well as interest of the State that ameliorating laws will be speedily passed, which will gradually have the effect of reconciling and habituating the masters, and preparing the slaves for a change which, as Mr. Jefferson says, must sooner or later take place with or without the consent of the masters. It behooves Virginia to move in this great question; and it is a solemn duty which her politicians owe to their country, to themselves, and to their posterity, to look ahead and make provision for the future, and secure the peace, prosperity and glory of their country.

The policy of Virginia for some years past has been most unfortunate. So far from acting as if Slavery were an evil which ought to be gotten rid of, every measure which could be taken has been taken to perpetuate it, as if it were a blessing. Her political pilots have acted like the inexperienced navigator, who, to get rid

of the slight inconvenience of the safety-valves have hermetically sealed them, not foreseeing that the inevitable consequence will be the bursting of the boiler, and dreadful havoc among all on board. No law has been passed under the *commonwealth* to ameliorate the black code of the *colony* of Virginia; on the contrary, new laws have been passed, adding to the oppression of the unfortunate negroes, and which have not only abridged the rights of humanity, but of the citizen. Such is the character of the law which restricts and to a great degree prohibits the master from manumitting his slave. The idea should be ever present to the politicians of Virginia, that the state of Slavery is an unnatural state, and cannot exist forever; it must come to an end by consent or by force; and if by consent, it must from all experience, as from the nature of things, be preceded by ameliorating laws, which will have the effect of gradually and imperceptibly loosening the bonds of servitude.

Nothing is more erroneous than the idea which is entertained by many, that ameliorating laws, and especially manumissions, are productions of insurrections among the slaves. The history of the British and Spanish West Indies shows that in those Islands where they have prevailed most, the slaves have behaved best, and insurrections have occurred oftenest where the slaves have been most oppressed and manumissions most restricted. Indeed, we never hear of insurrections in the Spanish Islands, where the slaves are most under the protection of the law, and where there are no restrictions on manumissions. Virginia should repeal the law against emancipation, prohibit the domestic slave-trade—which is nearly allied in all its odious features to the African slave trade—restrict the power of the master in disposing of his slaves, by preventing him from separating the child from its parent, the husband from his wife, etc., and if possible, connect the slave under proper modifications to the soil, or at least to the vicinity of his birth; instruct the slaves especially in the duties of Religion; extend to them the protection of the laws, and punish severity in the master, and when cruelly exercised by him, it should vest the right in the slave to his freedom; or to be sold at an assessed valuation. These and many other provisions might be adopted which would have a most salutary effect, and especially the Spanish provision, which gives the right to the slave to buy a portion of his time as soon as he can procure the means, either by his own labor or by the bounty of others; thus, for instance, suppose a negro worth

\$600 on paying \$100, he is entitled to one day in each week, and so on. In connection with the emancipation of slaves, I should provide for the removal by bounty and otherwise, of free negroes from the country, as the natural difference, and unfortunate prejudice existing between the whites and blacks would make it the interest of both to be separated. This subject, is too big for a letter, and I can only add, that if I could see ameliorating laws adopted, if I did not live to see the emancipation, I should at least die with the happy consolation of believing that measures were in progress for the consummation of ultimate justice to the descendants of the unfortunate African; and that my country, and the decendants of my family, if not my nephews and neices, would lie down in peace and safety, and would not have entailed on them an unnatural and odious system, productive of strife, enmity and war, between themselves and their domestics. I was in hopes to have been able by this time to have informed you and my other friends of the result of the malicious suit instituted against me for freeing my negroes, and which is pending in our Supreme Court. The case was argued last week, but the court has adjourned to the 1st Monday of January, next, without deciding it. I was much disappointed in not getting a decision; I have however but little fear as to the result.